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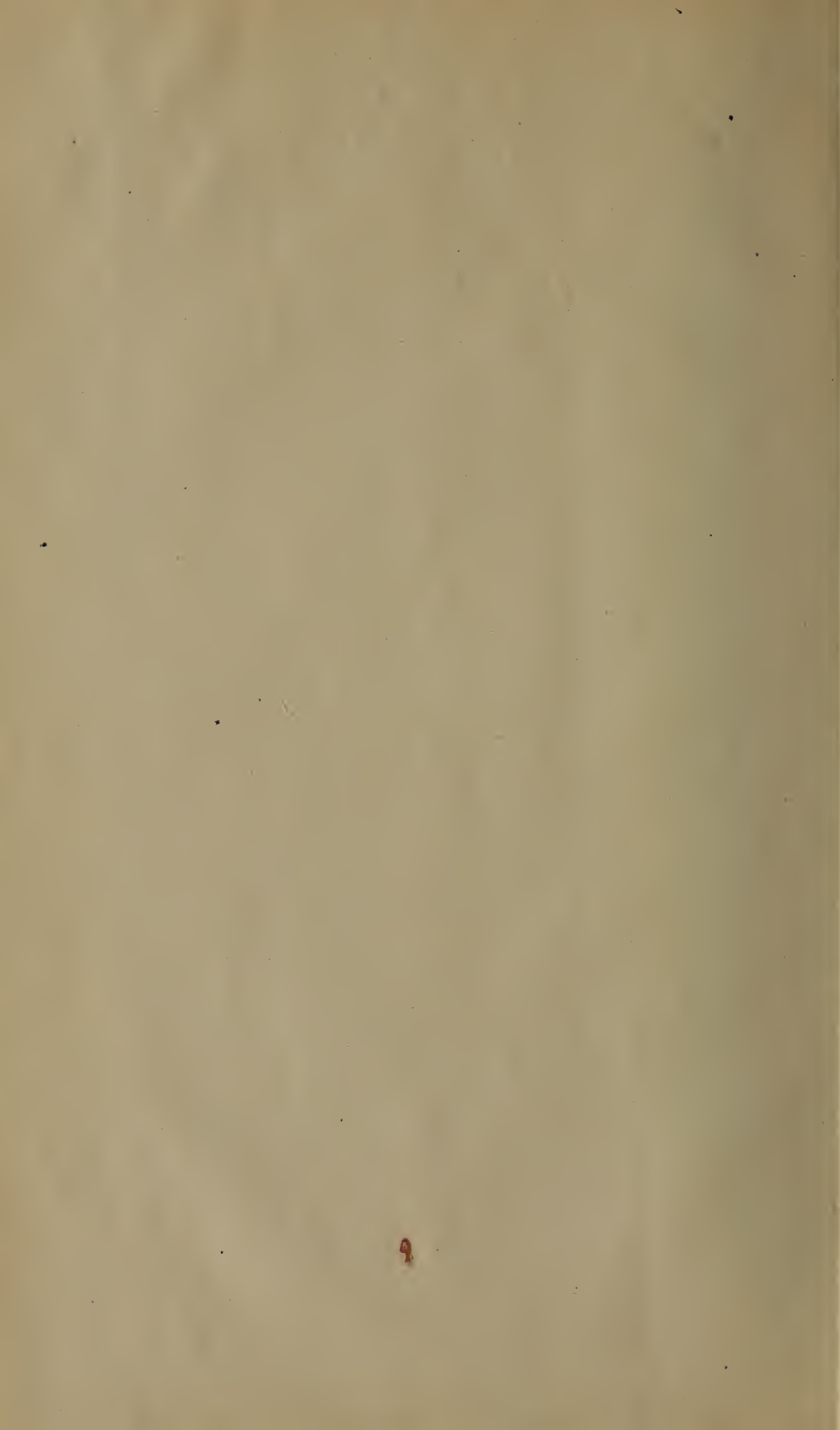


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EULOGIUM

ON

THOMAS C. BRINSMADE, M. D.

READ BEFORE THE RENSSELAER COUNTY MEDICAL SOCIETY

BY

GEO. H. HUBBARD, A. M., M. D.

READ BEFORE THE STATE MEDICAL SOCIETY FEBRUARY 2, 1869, BY
SPECIAL REQUEST OF THE SOCIETY.



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ARTICLE XXIII.

Eulogium on THOMAS C. BRINSMADE, M. D., read before the Rensselaer County Medical Society, July 13, 1868, by GEO. H. HUBBARD, A. M., M. D., President of the Society. (Read before the State Medical Society, Feb. 2, 1869, by special request of the Society.)

*" Pallida Mors æquo pulsat pede
Pauperum tabernas, regumque turres."*

Our every act, whether of labor or recreation, of duty or self-indulgence, but brings us nearer and nearer to the final act which shall close our earthly career, and 'tis but wise to view this inherent necessity of life with complaisance if not with joy.

As we approach the end of life we come to look upon death in its true light as our certain and secure rest from labor and fatigue,—as the greatest and best event of the transitory drama called existence.

How terrible would be our condition had our life no relief in death. Imagination fails to portray the evil of a life without this termination.

We poor feeble ministers of health, whose best efforts can but repair the slighter ills of life, can best appreciate the rest of the grave—the only certain relief from pain and suffering.

Yet, when death comes near to us and takes away one with whom we are intimately associated, it is but natural that we find ourselves mournfully regretting this necessity of life, and that those we love must submit to the unvarying law of nature. "'Tis meet that we should mourn," and there is a sweet melancholy in speaking of the dead.

Our grief for the death of our friend is rendered more tolerable by contemplating his long and laborious career and its beautifully appropriate termination. 'Tis sweet and becoming to review the life of the good and great.

We call men great whose lives have displayed acts which attract the public gaze,—of War or Statesmanship; but here we have a man in the truest sense great, by the excellence of his life.

Without any of the ordinary accessories of distinction, devoted to the laborious and unattractive details of ours called distinctively the silent profession, we find him by a conscientious and faithful devotion to that profession acquiring the love and respect of the community, so that on his death not only a whole city but thousands outside are found in mourning.

Thomas Clark Brinsmade was born on the 16th day of June, A. D. 1802, at New Hartford, Litchfield county, Connecticut. He was the

third son of Dr. Thomas Brinsmade, and was born in a small house a little north of the old church in that part of the town called "Town Hill." A few years since Dr. B. visited this house and found it but slightly changed since his childhood, — the same wall paper remaining on the bedroom, the old well with its sweep and oaken bucket. His friend, Dr. Benjamin H. Catlin, father of the Secretary of this society, writes of his early years as follows :

"In the year 1816 a building was erected in Harwinton, my native town, adjoining New Hartford, for an Academy, and the first session of the school was held in the winter of 1816-17. It was then and there that I first became acquainted with Thomas C. Brinsmade, being fellow students. He was then reading Virgil and was the most advanced student in the school, few of the others having attended other than a common district school. My friend at that time was a lad of about fourteen, was very pleasant and agreeable, and a close student. How long he pursued his classical studies I cannot tell, but he was doubtless nearly or quite fitted for college. Dr. Brinsmade pursued his medical studies with Dr. Peet, a distinguished physician at New Marlboro, Berkshire county, Massachusetts. Dr. P. was his uncle, being the son of his paternal grandmother by a second marriage. I was for a time successor of Dr. B. in Dr. Peet's office, and know the opportunities he enjoyed there. Dr. P. had an extensive country practice and dispensed his own medicine. The duty of the student was to prepare and put up the medicine, attend to the office practice, and occasionally ride with the Doctor. He attended one course of lectures at the medical department of Yale College, and at its close in March, 1823, was licensed to practice by the Connecticut State Medical Society. At that time perhaps half of the medical students took licenses. In 1839 the honorary degree of M. D. was conferred on Dr. B. by Yale College, and in 1857 he was elected an honorary member by the Connecticut Medical Society. We considered he had honored his native State, more especially the medical profession."

Dr. Brinsmade came to Lansingburgh in the fall of 1823. Of his practice in that village little is necessary to be said. He was the same close student and pleasant and agreeable gentleman described by Dr. Catlin, and very soon secured the confidence of the community. In 1833, Dr. Sheldon, a leading physician of Troy, died, and Dr. Brinsmade was induced by the strong influences exerted by some of the most prominent citizens to remove here as his successor. This was a fortunate move for all parties ; — for Dr. B., as it gave him the advantage of a wider field of practice ; for this city, as it secured to it the best years of one of the best physicians which this country has

ever produced, and for the profession, as it caused the development of faculties which might have remained dormant in a less favored locality. He practiced medicine here with an energy, industry and success never excelled for the period of thirty-five years, and will be long remembered as the beloved physician by many thousands, including five generations.

Dr. Brinsmade was married on the 24th day of September, 1828, to Miss Elizabeth Walsh of Lansingburgh, who still survives. This union proved eminently happy, and many times when speaking of the prospect of death, he has expressed no fear of dying, but much feeling at the prospect of leaving his wife. Three children were the result of this union; one died in infancy; his son, Horatio Walsh Brinsmade, died at the age of twenty-one, just as he had completed a very thorough preparation for the practice of his father's profession, and the only remaining child, an amiable and accomplished daughter, died in 1860, leaving them childless.

The death of these children cast a shade of melancholy depression which remained through his life. After their death he seemed more devoted to his profession than ever, seeming to seek in his labors for the good of his race that mental solace of which the loss of his children had deprived him.

From the commencement of his professional career, Dr. B. availed himself of the benefits of association with his professional brethren. He became a member of this Society in January, 1824, immediately after commencing practice in Lansingburgh, and in 1848 was elected its President, serving two years. On retiring from this position in June, 1850, he gave an elaborate address on the Medical Topography of the city of Troy. This address is contained in the published Transactions of the State Medical Society for 1851, and is the first published production of his pen which I have been able to find. In 1844 he was elected a delegate to the New York State Medical Society, serving four years, and a permanent member in 1850, since which time he has borne a prominent place in its counsels. He was elected Vice-President in 1857 and President in 1858. In 1858 he made an address as Vice-President on the Registration of Disease, giving an accurate record of his practice for twenty-one years, carefully analyzed and tabulated, occupying three hundred pages of the published Transactions and comprising statistics of 37,872 cases. His address as President, delivered in 1859, is mainly devoted to the influence of medical men upon each other and upon the public, especially in an associated capacity. It is an ethical address, showing much research, and comprises twenty-six printed pages. In 1860 he presented an additional paper on Registration of Diseases, includ-

ing statistics of 2,056 cases treated in 1858 and 1859. He was elected a delegate to the first annual session of the American Association at Baltimore in 1848, and has been present at most of its sessions since that time, becoming identified as one of the leading members, serving repeatedly on the most important committees. He was elected a Vice-President in 1856, and also a delegate to the International Medical Congress, and attended its sessions at Paris in the summer of 1867.

At the session of the American Medical Association at Washington, in May last, he presented, in behalf of the New York State Medical Society, the following resolutions, which were adopted :

"Resolved, That the chairman of the delegates from this Society to the American Medical Association, be requested to present to said Association, as the desire of the Medical Society of the State of New York, the following resolution, and to urge its adoption :

"Resolved, That the faculties of the several medical colleges of the United States be recommended to announce, explicitly, in their annual commencement circulars and advertisements, that they will not receive certificates of time of study from irregular practitioners ; and that they will not confer the degree upon any one who may acknowledge his intention to practice in accordance with any exclusive system."

This was his last public effort to improve the standard of education in his profession, and as such has a peculiar interest.

Dr. Brinsmade wrote but little, but the few papers he has published remain as evidences of his devotedness to his profession.

His duties as a citizen were promptly and faithfully discharged, but in his own unobtrusive way and manner. The ordinary attractions of public life were lost upon him, but to any movement tending to make men better, physically, mentally, or morally, he gave his best efforts.

I have not learned that he ever held a political office, but he served repeatedly as Health Officer, and Chairman of the Board of Health of this city.

He early became a member of the Protestant Episcopal Church ; was a Vestryman of St. Paul's for many years, and on the death of Hon. Isaac McConihe, was elected Junior Warden, which office he held at the time of his death.

He was one of the earliest patrons of the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. In the paper he was reading, in the very last moments of his life, he states that all the property of the Institute was purchased by one of the committee, in 1845, for less than five hundred dollars. I am informed of what his characteristic modesty did not

allow himself to state, that he was the purchaser, and that he borrowed the money with which to purchase this property, which he eventually gave to the Institute.

Of his connection with the Institute, one of the trustees writes as follows: "I regret to say, that owing to the burning of our records in the great fire of May 10, 1862, I cannot give you the date of the election of Dr. Brinsmade as a trustee of the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. In an address prepared by Dr. B., to be delivered to the graduating class, and which was read at the commencement, he stated that he had been a member of the board of trustees for twenty years.

"Dr. Brinsmade has been a member of the 'prudential committee,' on which the larger portion of the business affairs of the Institute have devolved, ever since my own connection with the board, some fifteen years or more, and I can say that no member of the board, during the whole period, has contributed more generously of time and material aid to advance its interests. Dr. Brinsmade was not one who sought prominent official position, and when elected Vice-President of the Institute, March 20, 1865, it was an honor unsought. Upon the resignation of Mr. Winslow as President, there was but one sentiment in the board as to his successor, and at a full meeting, held May 7th, 1868, he was unanimously elected President. With such an experience, Dr. B. did not feel at liberty to decline the office, and at once entered upon its duties, with a renewed determination to secure such additional endowment as would enlarge the usefulness and insure the permanence and continued progress of the Institute."

On the organization of the Marshall Infirmary, in 1851, he was elected one of the Governors, and was one of the visiting physicians from that time till his death. Always prompt in his attendance, his duties there entailed upon him an immense amount of gratuitous professional labor.

Dr. B. was one of the original trustees of the New York State Inebriate Asylum, having been appointed by the act granting the charter, March 27, 1857, and has been elected each year from that time. An officer of the institution says: "He was held in high estimation by his fellow trustees, and his opinions and counsels had great weight with them. He always manifested the liveliest interest in the institution, and did very much toward placing it on its present basis." He attended the last annual meeting, June 11th, and took an active part in its deliberations. A letter to the superintendent was among the last acts of his life.

The circumstances attending his death are too well known to require extended notice. While attending a meeting of the citizens of Troy, convened to raise funds for the Rensselaer Polytechnic

Institute, of which he was President, and while reading an important paper, his heart suddenly ceased to beat, and he passed from time to eternity on the 22d day of June, A. D. 1868.

This appropriate death was alone needed to make complete his earthly career. Fit ending for fit life!

Dr. Brinsmade had enjoyed what he always called good health. He had occasional attacks of illness, sometimes severe, but of no great duration. He was subject to sharp shooting pains of the breast, of a neuralgic character, to which he paid no attention but for the moment. Early in 1867 he was attacked with severe pain in the left breast which prostrated him very rapidly, and much anxiety was felt for his recovery. But the attack, which proved to be pneumonic, was short. In a few days he resumed his daily routine of visits, and by over-exertion brought on a relapse. This was of no great duration, and with greater care he rapidly recovered. His visit to Europe seemed to have entirely re-established his health and strength, and upon his return he at once engaged in practice, with an energy which seemed to indicate many more years of usefulness. He made no complaint, and we had ceased to be specially anxious about his health. Thus it continued, till without any preparation, came the chilling announcement, "Dr. Brinsmade is dead!" On the post-mortem examination, the lungs showed evidence of repeated attacks of circumscribed inflammation, especially of the pleura, which was adherent at the apices, and in some places had undergone structural degeneration. Evidence of a recent circumscribed inflammation of the lung tissue, of which he had shown symptoms shortly before his death, were also found. Yet his lungs were better than his medical brethren, who knew him best, were led to expect. But if his lungs were better, his heart was worse. It appears that he had had for years, a well-grounded apprehension of heart disease, although he had quieted the fears of his nearest friends, and, perhaps, his own. The heart was considerably loaded with fat, but not to the extent properly called fatty degeneration. There was evidence of old inflammation of the left ventricle, both pericardial and endocardial, resulting in adhesion of the pericardium near the apex, and opposite a thickened endocardium, while between them the muscular wall was thinned and nearly destitute of muscular fibres. The aorta presented many atheromatous patches, extending more than twelve inches from the heart. Over one of these patches the lining membrane had given way, and presented an open ulcer of about eight lines by six. Those of you who are familiar with the lesions recorded as more frequently found after death from angina pectoris, will readily understand why Dr. Brinsmade died, when, where and as he did.

"De mortuis nil nisi bonum."

How useless the caution! How senseless the advice!

Lives there a slanderer so base, as aught to say but good of our deceased friend and brother?

His life is a poem, rivaling the proudest epic, wanting no element of completeness. The "good physician" is but tame, when we attempt to describe our loved and lost.

We thought we knew his value while we circled round him, our professional mentor, but only to-day, when we meet without his presence, can we fully realize that our never failing professional and personal friend can be consulted no more. But his life died not with him. "'Tis not all of life to live, nor all of death to die," and those of us who enjoyed his trust and friendship can never lose the influence of his life and labor. It will always be a lamp to our feet, and a strong encouragement under the most depressing occurrences of life.

It is not difficult for any of us, who knew him well, to analyze the character of our deceased friend. He had no concealments of matters proper to be known. We saw him as he was—the upright Christian gentleman.

The basis of his character was his unswerving regard for truth. He was true to himself—true to his profession—true to his associates in every relation of life,—true to his convictions of right and wrong, regardless of any petty self-interest which would seem to come in the way.

The next most prominent trait, was his untiring and indomitable industry. In this he excelled any man I ever knew. The amount of physical and mental labor he accomplished from day to day and year to year, would seem to be beyond the power of any human organization; yet all was done, and well done.

On these two prominent traits were based his excellences—religious, moral, professional and social. Such a man could but be a Christian, and just such a Christian as he was; unobtrusive, unbigoted with the largest charity toward all sects, and for all the weaknesses of poor human nature. Because to him vice was a monster, hideous, he did not establish himself the censor of the conduct of those whose mental and moral organization left them its victims. He pitied their weakness, and relieved their distress. Who can know the reforms induced by the silent, dignified example of this Christian physician, where a reprimand would have induced anger and resistance.

His religious and moral character were inseparably connected. His religion was based on the immutable principles of truth and justice, and his morality on the broad basis of a Christian's duty to his fellow man.

Mild and undemonstrative as he always was, he sometimes manifested considerable feeling when his instinctive delicacy concerning religious proprieties was outraged. He especially disliked any ill-timed or unseemly display or attempt to make merchandise of piety, and did not hesitate to express this feeling; his piety was displayed in acts rather than words: he preached not but practiced his profession as one prepared at any moment to give an account.

But it is with his professional character we are especially interested.

He was in the fullest sense a self-made man. From slender and imperfect preparation he went on accumulating professional knowledge, never ceasing to be a student, outstripping many of his early cotemporaries possessed of much greater advantages and becoming one of the most truly learned physicians in available practical knowledge to be found in this or any other country.

He practiced medicine with a singleness of purpose never excelled:—carefully cultivating every department of the profession;—avoiding all tendency to special practice and yet was the trusted counselor of those whose tastes led them to cultivate special branches. He would be one hour discussing Surgical Pathology and the propriety of an operation:—the next perhaps equally engrossed in grave questions of Gynæcology, on each occasion the associate of men devoted to these specialties. In breadth of professional capacity it is safe to say Dr. Brinsmade had few if any superiors in the profession.

Few men enjoyed the confidence of his brethren to an equal extent, and his consulting practice was in the later years of his life very large and eminently satisfactory and advantageous both to physician and patient.

But much the largest share of his consultations were those continually recurring cases where we consulted him privately at his own office as a son would consult a father. We instinctively turned to his great learning and long experience to verify or correct our opinions and practice. His kind and generous interest encouraged us to go to him with our hopes, fears and anxieties, never fearing to betray our ignorance and never failing to get his best advice freely and without fee or reward. The amount of time spent in these unpaid consultations was very large, but its full extent can never be known. We, each of us, know how much he did for us and for our patients, but he only knew the aggregate. He never boasted nor seemed to regard it as more than justly due from him to his brethren.

As would be justly expected he was especially tenacious of the honor and dignity of the profession. Impostors and pretenders of all sorts he always stoutly denounced, utterly refusing consultations or professional intercourse;—but he was careful that no inhumanity

should come of his refusal, and often rendered aid in critical cases which had been under the care of incompetent practitioners when less humane men would have refused assistance, but in no case have I known him to meet or recognize an irregular practitioner knowing him to be such.

His services were freely rendered to rich and poor alike. While he enjoyed the patronage of the intelligent and wealthy, he equally enjoyed the patronage of a greater share of the poor and lowly:—they received his care without limit:—like Sydenham, he considered them “his best patients, as God was their paymaster.”

The teachings of this life must be plain to the most obtuse intellect,—labor conquers all obstacles, and truth leads to success.

It may be said that Dr. Brinsmade was peculiarly fortunate in the many circumstances which rendered his life so preëminently successful:—but were not these circumstances one and all earned by his own labor and truth?—would any one of the seemingly fortunate accidents of his life have happened to him had he been indolent or vicious?

Much of his professional success came through the confidence of his professional brethren:—this confidence was the natural consequent to his large acquirements and acknowledged excellence in his profession as well as his unswerving faithfulness in all his relations to his associates.

Next to this was the personal esteem in which he was held by all classes and conditions of men. The thousands outside of his personal acquaintance who knew him only by his public acts properly appreciated and valued the excellence of his character.

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